

ORIGIN ACTION

AKA

RM R REP AI

ARA EUR FI

NEA INH

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AGR COM RRR

INT LAB TAR

TR AMB AIR

ARMY CIA NAVY

OSD USIA NSA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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SUBJECT: Monthly Report on Violence and Human Rights
August 1978

REF :

SUMMARY. The Lucas government had its first violent confrontation when police clashed with unauthorized demonstrators over the right to assemble. Riot police used tear gas to disperse protestors and "to uphold the law." Members of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) executed an informer and the Communist Party took credit for killing three soldiers. The press continued to report killings of criminals as evidence of a "death squad."

Bus drivers struck and the government declared the public sector workers union (CETE) illegal, setting off events which were to peak in violence and death weeks later as police, workers and students clashed.

The government announced plans to establish a unit in the President's office to prevent discrimination in hiring.

During August there were 22 deaths which were probably politically-related. This figure is equal to July and distinctly lower than the exceptional months of May (Panzós) and June (PMAs killed in retaliation). END SUMMARY.

Government-related Incidents. On August 4 police broke up a demonstration of students, workers, sympathetic clergy and the general public with tear gas (Guatemala 4592). Demonstrators were protesting the deaths of labor leader Mujía (Guatemala 4367) and Father López (Guatemala 3882)

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and other alleged repression. There were no deaths; arrested persons were subsequently released. Police action represented government determination to exercise its prerogative to require demonstrators to seek prior authorization, which the government stated would be automatic. It was the first such clash in several years and represented a change from the Laugerud administration's stance of overlooking the demonstration permit requirement.

Later in the month, two secondary students and two companions were arrested in Guatemala City by police for distributing subversive propaganda, a charge they denied. The Minister of Education refused to accede to the request of the secondary student association to intervene as the students' case had already been referred to the courts.

Days earlier, an individual had been arrested on the accusation of a neighbor that he had in his possession communist literature -- a book by Manuel Galich, a Guatemalan intellectual living in Havana. Responding to the press, Presidential spokesman Carlos TOLEDO Vielman said it was no crime to have a Marxist book and that citizens have the right to read what they will. On the other hand, he pointed out that the government has the right to limit the importation of such materials and to act against the possession and distribution of subversive literature. In fact, Marxist literature is abundant in local university bookstores, among others.

In Ocós, San Marcos Department, residents complained about irresponsible comisionados militares, unpaid civilian agents of the Army who recruit and inform in exchange for limited authority and the right to carry arms. The residents charged the comisionados with firing on vehicles carrying campesinos and with beating those who resisted recruiting efforts. The villagers told the press they had complained to the local military commander.

A Guatemalan student, Rébulo Arturo PADILLA, was granted safe conduct after having sought asylum in the Venezuelan Embassy here. The Guatemalan government had said that Padilla was not wanted by the police, but the latter maintained he feared for his life for political reasons, which were never specified. Common speculation, supported by family insistence that Padilla had no political connections, was that the asylee's motives were economic.

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Guerrilla-related Violence. On August 3, some twenty armed men raided the Mario ESPANA farm in the Petén. They told the manager that the owner was guilty of mistreating workers and would be killed if he did not leave the finca in the next ten days. They then set a fire and fled. Although the raid bore the earmarks of the EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor), the latter has not taken credit for it.

Later in the month an EGP bulletin announced the execution of one Juan PEREZ Toma by the Frente Guerrillero Otto René CASTILLO as a spy and agent of Army Intelligence. The bulletin said the EGP had dealt similarly with his uncle, Gaspar PEREZ, former mayor of San Juan Cotzal (in December 1976), and a cousin, Diego PEREZ Gómez (in March 1978).

Armed men in two vehicles attacked three soldiers in a jeep near Quezaltenango on August 24, killing them and taking their weapons. A Communist Party bulletin later credited the PGT's Comité Regional Carlos Alvarado Jerez of the Costa Grande Regional (Command) with the deed.

Other Violence. Of the other 18 probably politically-related deaths, one was a supposed agent of the Minister of Government, one a "confidential police agent," one a farmer killed by masked men, and two were villagers killed by men dressed in olive drab.

On August 16, a leftist writer for the newspaper Impacto, Oscar Arturo PALENCIA, was reportedly the target of a kidnap attempt by unknown persons. He managed to break away from his would-be abductors and escape.

Some 14 persons were individually reported by the press as probably victims of an alleged "death squad" (see July report). Six of these were reported by the press as definitely having criminal records.

Human Rights Atmospherics. Guatemala City bus drivers, dissatisfied with government efforts to resolve their wage dispute with owners, struck for a week in early August. When they agreed to return to work, bus owners held buses at garages, arguing they could not pay the 100% wage increases decreed by the government from the mere five cent fare. Poor to non-

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existent service was to remain a critical issue for the next several weeks (into October), often requiring police action to protect buses from damage by drivers or from being hidden by owners after the municipal government took over the administration of the bus lines.

During August, Presidential Press Secretary Carlos Toledo Vielman stated that CETE (a government workers "confederation") and the Committee for Peace and Justice were illegal. CETE is illegal, he said, because it is against the law for a government workers association to undertake union activities. According to Toledo Vielman, the Peace and Justice Committee did not request nor receive permission of the Minister of Government to be established and was therefore illegal. Moreover, Committee pronouncements in the press lacked the names of those responsible for its accusation, and the government was considering legal action against it. (No action has been taken as of this writing.) Meanwhile, President Lucas held a meeting with leaders of CETE. The government explained that Lucas was meeting with the leaders as individual government associations since CETE lacked legal standing. CETE leaders denied the government's characterization of the meeting as a success. There was no dialogue, only monologue.

Toledo Vielman announced President Lucas' plans to create an anti-discrimination unit within the President's office to prevent discrimination in employment for reasons of race, sex or religion. The stated objective is to promote social integration.

Vice President VILLAGRAN KRAMER was criticized by the president of the "World University Service" for not having investigated human rights violations in Guatemala, such as the assassination of labor lawyer Lopez Larrave last year and Father Hermógenes Lopez this summer.

Appearances Deceive. On the evening of August 8, three men in a pickup truck intercepted the car of the Uruguayan Ambassador whose 15-year-old daughter was the only passenger. Having surveyed the scene and having attracted the unfavorable attention of other drivers, the occupants of the pickup returned to their vehicle and "f". The story was

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originally reported as a frustrated kidnapping. It later appeared that there was nothing sinister in the incident -- just a case of flirting.

Statistics. Of the 22 deaths having political overtones, 9 occurred in the Indian highlands, 4 each in the Oriente, Guatemala City and the Pacific lowlands, and one in Izabal.

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